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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU  
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3189  
RHMFIISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1228

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000006

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KHUM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: MORE GOAJ HARASSMENT OF RADIO LIBERTY

REF: BAKU 3

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology is threatening to cut the Azerbaijan office of Radio Liberty's satellite connection to Radio Liberty's headquarters in Prague. This action appears to be illegal, as Radio Liberty has a functioning agreement with the Ministry for use of this equipment, and has paid the appropriate fees. Removal of this satellite connection would make it very difficult and expensive, but not impossible, for Radio Liberty's Baku branch to continue its operations. The Minister of Communications told the Charge today that he would look into this harassment and that he did not think there would be further problems. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) After shutting down Radio Liberty's (known locally as Radio Azadliq) access to FM frequencies on January 1 (reftel), on January 5 officials of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology informed the station that there were problems with its use of a satellite connection to Radio Liberty Headquarters in Prague. This connection allows Radio Azadliq to transmit information (both data and voice communication) to Prague, where it is broadcast (via internet, shortwave, and satellite). Radio Azadliq has an agreement, in force since 2007, for the use of this connection in exchange for a fee. This agreement is automatically renewed every year, and for calendar year 2009 it is in force and the fee has been paid. Similar systems exist in 16 countries where Radio Liberty operates.

¶3. (C) On January 6 three officials from the Ministry of Communication's Division of National Frequencies arrived at Radio Azadliq headquarters and asked to inspect the equipment used for this connection. Azadliq Bureau Chief Khadija Ismayilova complied. After inspecting the servers, the officials pulled out supplies to seal this equipment and make it unusable. Ismayilova stopped the officials from doing so without using force, and after several phone calls to the Ministry, the officials left Azadliq's office peacefully.

¶4. (C) Radio Liberty headquarters plans to follow up on this incident with a letter to the Ministry explaining that the satellite connection is legal in line with their agreement, and is unrelated to FM broadcasting. The Charge called the Minister of Communications, who claimed to know nothing about his officials visiting Azadliq. The Minister stated that the only decision of the National Television and Radio Council they have received regards FM broadcasts, and he promised to look into the issue. He said that he did not think that this would be a problem in future.

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) While the lower level Ministry of Communications is claiming this is a technical issue, it is clear that this action is simply more harassment of the already battered radio station. These same officials were the ones who sealed ANS television station in 2006 when it was closed for political reasons. It is unclear at this point, however, whether these Ministry of Communications officials are acting on their own on this issue, or whether this further impediment to Azadliq's work has been ordered at a higher level. The Embassy will raise this issue in a range of meetings with government officials this week.

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